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THE ESSAY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

THE essay was defined by Dr. Johnson as “a loose sally of the mind; an irregular, indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition.” This definition furnishes an accurate description of the periodical essay, which had its origin in the eighteenth century and became so popular a form of literature. Probably it was the contemporary essay that the lexicographer had in mind when he gave his definition. The term is still used in this sense, though it is also used to include a thorough and exhaustive treatment of a subject. It is the purpose of this paper to give, not a complete or full treatment of the periodical essay in the eighteenth century, but rather a brief sketch of its rise and its development in the hands of its leading practitioners during the period named.

It is presumably safe to consider Montaigne the father of the modern essay. Certainly he seems to have been the first modern practitioner of the literary art, practiced in ancient times by Seneca and Plutarch in their ethical and religious reflections. As a critic has observed, Montaigne was the first philosopher in an easy-chair. But difficult would be the task to trace step by step the influence of the French philosopher on English literature, and I do not propose here to attempt so minute an investigation. Suffice it to state that Montaigne's essays are said to have been diligently read by Bacon; but to what extent he was influenced by them, it were impossible to determine. Indeed, while, by the style and matter of his essays, Bacon may, in a certain sense, be regarded as a pioneer of the essay form, still he is clearly not entitled to rank as the inventor of the periodical essay. Dryden can perhaps offer a better claim to this distinction; for, though he wrote no formal essays, yet by his wholesome influence upon English prose, and by the literary criticisms of his prefaces, he did quite as much as, if

not more than, Bacon in preparing the way for the form of the essay.

There existed originally a certain relation, in subject-matter at least, between the periodical essay and the drama. The relation concerns, however, only one phase of the drama—namely, the comedy of manners. When comedy came to be neglected and ceased to be presented on the stage, the public seemed to crave some form of literary entertainment that should take the place of comedy in reflecting contemporary manners. This followed as a natural sequence from the change that had taken place in social life during and immediately after the Restoration. Consequently, in the reign of Queen Anne the essay undertook to supply this demand, “to judiciously season culture with the requisite spice of scandal, and to exhibit the foibles of the time with a humor that should not be impure.” As a result there sprang into existence such brilliant though short-lived periodicals as the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, the like of which had never been before. Their very names are suggestive of their character: they observed and gossiped—in a word, they criticised the foibles of the times, contemporary manners. Here then without any doubt we have the origin of the periodical essay; and the founders of these famous periodicals were Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.

There is another aspect of the problem which needs to be considered in tracing the origin of the periodical essay. It has just been suggested in the preceding paragraph. It is the relation of the essay to the press. To be sure, one must be on one's guard on this ground, lest the inviting problem of the history of the press lead one far afield. Only the briefest reference to this matter can here be made.

Three days after Queen Anne ascended the throne appeared the first regular daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*. During the succeeding year (1703), Daniel Defoe, author of the immortal “Robinson Crusoe,” founded, within the walls of Newgate prison, an influential political newspaper which he called the *Review*. (It was not, however, a daily.) This paper had more effect in shaping the form and charac-

ter of the nascent essay than any other of the many ephemeral newspapers of those times. But Defoe's journal, like other mushroom papers of his day, was not destined to a long existence, and ceased to appear after the passage of the Stamp Act imposing a penny a sheet. This chilling act, in the jesting language of the *Spectator*, produced a general "fall of the leaf." It is worthy of note, however, that in this *Review* of Defoe's, which lived only a decade, some are inclined to see the prototype of the *Tatler*. But if Defoe's *Review* can be considered the *Tatler in posse*, it most assuredly was not the *Tatler in esse*. The motive that called the *Review* into being and fostered it was primarily a political affair. Yet it is true that Defoe read the signs of the times, and yielded so far to the pressure of the moment as to establish a column which he called the "Scandalous Club."

Now, it is quite within the range of the possible that Steele may have taken his cue from Defoe, and gotten from the "Scandalous Club" the suggestion for "using club life as a suitable framework for his essays." But there is a vast difference between the essays of Defoe and those of Steele. Defoe's essays lack that wit, gentle humor, and graceful ease which are conspicuous characteristics of Addison's and Steele's papers in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Defoe had a different conception of an essay. His notion of an essay was that of a hastily written article upon some subject of passing interest. It never occurred to him to present the thought in the very best literary form at his command. Not regarding the essay as essentially literature, he did not take the pains to give his essays a creditable degree of finish and style. This he did for his novels, and thus became the author of the first great English novel. It follows, then, that Defoe's claim to be classed as the founder of the modern essay reposes on no basis of fact. This credit belongs to Richard Steele.

In April, 1709, the initial number of the *Tatler* appeared under the editorship of Isaac Bickerstaff, Steele's adopted pseudonym. The following division of its contents was

arranged by the editor: "All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment shall be under the article of White's Chocolate House; poetry under that of Will's Coffee-House; learning under the title of Grecian; foreign and domestic news you will have from St. James's Coffee-House; and what else I shall on any other subject offer shall be dated from my own apartment."

One doubtless notices with some degree of curiosity the repetition of "coffee-house" in the above announcement. This is significant as pointing out the prominence of the coffee-house in the social life of Queen Anne's time. Indeed, the periodical essay is very intimately connected in its history with club life. The clubs were the *rendezvous* of the men of letters, where literary gossip was exchanged. As Lobban well observes in the introduction to his "English Essays:" "It was eminently natural for the early essayists, when they were on an outlook for a simple device by which to give some degree of unity to their loose sallies, to avail themselves of this predominating social feature. The atmosphere of the coffee-house pervaded the whole of the literature of the reign, and affected it in many obvious ways. Both Defoe and Swift conceived the idea of an English academy, and the coffee-house to a certain extent realized the conception. In the latter days of Johnson this becomes more apparent, but even in Queen Anne's time the literary taste of the town was almost entirely directed by the judgments of the chief coffee-house dictators. The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed a vast improvement in the manners and customs of society, a reformation in effecting which the essay was not the least powerful factor; but at the same time it is indubitable that the coffee-house, and not the home, was the center of social life, and that the former was regarded as a kind of happy compromise between Restoration profligacy and Puritan domesticity."

When the *Tatler* began to appear curiosity was on tiptoe to identify the author of the papers. It is said that even Addison did not suspect Steele's authorship till the fifth number. As for the journal itself, it was a phenomenal

success from the very start, and was far in advance of anything of the kind ever before attempted. Steele soon enlisted the active coöperation of Addison in his new enterprise, and the eighteenth number is from the latter's deft and graceful pen. But the *Tatler*, like all its predecessors from the periodical press of those times, was short-lived, being discontinued in 1711, after it had attained to its two hundred and seventy-first number. Of these two hundred and seventy-one numbers, Steele was the author of one hundred and eighty-eight, Addison of forty-two, and both joint authors of thirty-six. The remaining few were written by Hughes, a clever minor author of the day.

Steele seems to have been made of coarser clay than Addison. Steele's intellect was not so refined as Addison's; yet the former was of a more emotional nature than the latter, who appears to have been somewhat phlegmatic and cold. Indeed, it is Steele's prevailing tenderness of heart that serves as a touchstone to reveal his authorship in the *Tatler* papers. He is really one of the most pathetic of English writers. His style, too, as being less correct than Addison's, and sometimes even ungrammatical, is a good test of his authorship. He conceived the idea that, writing in the character of a tattler, he ought consistently to affect a certain "incorrectness of style and an air of common speech." His matter as well as his manner is much more extravagant and less elegant than is Addison's. In his own words: "The elegance, purity, and correctness in Addison's writings were not so much my purpose," said he, "as, in any intelligible manner I could, to rally all those singularities of human life, through the different professions and characters in it, which obstruct anything that was truly good and great."

In the dedication of the first collected papers of the *Tatler* to Arthur Maynwaring, Steele acknowledges his purpose "to publish a paper which shall observe upon the manners of the pleasurable as well as the busy part of mankind." Here, then, is stated Steele's avowed intention of establishing a paper which, through its articles, should exhibit con-

temporary manners. Now these articles were the essays which Steele himself and his collaborator contributed to the columns of the *Tatler*. Consequently we find the essay, in its very inception, used as an instrument for the exhibition of the manners and customs of contemporary social life. This is generally true of the periodical essay in the eighteenth century.

Two months after the suspension of the *Tatler* another joint enterprise of still more pith was projected by Addison and Steele. This was the famous *Spectator*, the first number of which appeared in March, 1711. The success of this journal was assured from the start. The paper was announced to appear daily, and to contain the reflections and impressions of the members of an imaginary club, of which "Mr. Spectator" was the soul and center. The purpose of this paper, as Addison boasted, was to bring "philosophy out of closets, libraries, schools, and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and coffee-houses." The paper continued to appear till December, 1712, when it was suspended; but it was afterwards revived, in 1714. It contained five hundred and fifty-five numbers, of which two hundred and thirty-six were from the pen of Steele, and a larger number from the pen of Addison; one, "The Messiah," from Pope; and the remainder from the minor authors of the day. The most famous character in these papers was the Worcestershire knight, Sir Roger de Coverley, who was the creation of Addison's inventive genius. Addison also contributed frequent critiques on "Paradise Lost," on the opera, tragedy, and other topics. In the five hundred and seventeenth number he killed the amiable knight Sir Roger, as he said, "that nobody else might murder him."

The crowning feature of the *Spectator* papers was the character of Sir Roger, the English country gentleman. He is the hero of the book. I said a moment ago that we are indebted to Addison for the invention of this character. This is generally conceded. But the fact is, the knight is the product of the inventive genius of both Addison and Steele, for the former developed him after the latter had

sketched him. Nor, indeed, do the two authors seem to have drawn his character consistent throughout. For example, Steele in his original sketch describes Sir Roger as having been formerly a fine gentleman who was acquainted with town life; Addison, on the other hand, represents him as a rather plain country squire who had come up to the great metropolis, and visits the chief places of interest there—the theater, the Temple, the Abbey, Vauxhall, etc. But despite this slight incongruity, arising, no doubt, from differences of conception, the character of the old knight is a most attractive sketch and thoroughly natural. Addison is at his best in his delineation of the knight's conduct at these places of attraction. Here, as nowhere else, we see Addison's humor, his subtle wit, his delicate grace, and withal his admirable lightness of touch.

If any one quality of Addison's were to be mentioned as being predominant in these essays, it would probably be his simplicity. Indeed, this quality is the peculiar merit of his prose, which is generally taken as a model. His style is thus described by Johnson, the imperious literary authority of his century: "His [Addison's] prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling, pure without scrupulosity, and exact without elaboration; always equable, always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences. Addison never deviates from his track to snatch a grace; he seeks no ambitious ornaments, and tries no hazardous innovations. His page is always luminous, but never blazes with unexpected splendor. It was apparently his principal endeavor to avoid all harshness and severity of diction; he is therefore sometimes verbose in his transitions and connections, and sometimes descends too much to the language of conversation; yet if his language had been less idiomatical, it might have lost somewhat of its genuine Anglicism. What he attempted, he performed; he is never feeble, and he did not wish to be energetic; he is never rapid, and he never stagnates. His sentences have neither studied amplitude nor affected brevity; his periods, though not diligently rounded, are

voluble and easy. Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."

Addison's style had a stimulating influence upon the development of English prose. Despite De Quincey's strictures upon Addison's superficiality, his essays, by reason of their admirable style and matter, produced the wholesome effect of diffusing a taste for learning and of quickening the feeble interest then existing in literary criticism. However, in this connection it would be better not to speak of Addison alone, but of the joint influence of Addison and Steele. Contemporary observers of manners bear evidence as to the moral influence exerted by the essays of these two mild reformers, affirming that many of the little immoralities and questionable social practices were put under the ban as a result of their criticism. "It is impossible," says Gay, "to conceive the effect Steele's writings have had on the town; how many thousand follies they have either quite banished or given a very great check to; . . . how entirely they have convinced our fops and young fellows of the value and advantage of learning." Such was the influence from a stylistic as well as a moral point of view of the essays of the *Spectator*.

The *Spectator* was succeeded by the *Guardian*, the first number of which appeared on the 12th of March, 1713. With the hundred and seventy-sixth number this paper, like its predecessors, suspended publication. Addison and Steele were likewise the chief contributors to this periodical. Subsequently the *Guardian* was reissued as the *Englishman* under the sole management of Steele, and conducted mainly as a political organ. But this reached only its fifty-seventh number, when it was discontinued, to be followed in quick succession by two other sheets, the *Lover* and the *Reader*. These in turn were doomed to early suspension. Meanwhile Addison published independently a paper of his own—the *Freeholder*—which was brought to an end with its fifty-fifth number, in 1716. It was through this channel that Addison gave to the world his interesting character of the Tory fox hunter. But political passion had now come to run so high that the essays pub-

lished in the last-named journals degenerated into mere diatribes and caricatures. Addison and Steele threw themselves, without restraint and with all the warmth of their natures, into the political affairs of the times; and, sad to relate, the old friends, if they did not actually quarrel, at all events became estranged from one another. This estrangement Steele, with characteristic generosity of heart, bitterly lamented upon the premature death of Addison, which occurred shortly afterwards, in 1719.

It is quite evident that the periodical essay, through the zealous labors of Addison and Steele, had now become established as a definite form of English literature. But these authors not only invented the periodical essay and gave it a foothold in the literature; by the perfecting of their art they carried the essay to its acme of development. After their death the essay, it is true, was practiced, but chiefly by minor writers and imitators, and after awhile it seems to have fallen into disfavor with the public.

It remained for Johnson in the Georgian era to attempt a resuscitation of the periodical essay, so popular in Queen Anne's time. The result of his earnest effort was the establishment of the *Rambler*. This paper was first issued in 1750, and inaugurated a new epoch for the essay. Johnson's purpose, says Boswell, was "to come forth in the character for which he was eminently qualified—a majestic teacher of moral and religious wisdom." "The *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian*," continues the biographer of the great Cham, "were the last of the kind published in England, which had stood the test of a long trial; and such an interval had now elapsed since their publication as made him justly think that to many of his readers this form of instruction would in some degree have the advantage of novelty." The *Rambler* was therefore projected as a successor to the *Spectator*, of which it was designed to be an imitation. But Johnson's ponderosity was far removed from Addison's graceful elegance and lightness of touch, and was likely to pall on the public taste. It is not, therefore, surprising that the *Rambler* suspended publication in 1752, after a

two years' existence. Johnson had probably grown weary in his effort to revive the public interest in the essay and to rival in brilliance of execution the famous papers of the *Spectator*, and consequently the death of his wife furnished him a suitable opportunity for bringing the *Rambler* to a close.

Johnson wrote all the numbers of the *Rambler* except five, which were contributed by several of his friends. At first it was not known who the author of the *Rambler* was; but at length Johnson's heavy, pedantic style betrayed his identity, and his authorship was no longer a secret. The publisher, in order to make Johnson more hopeful when the *clientèle* of the paper had begun to diminish appreciably, remarked that "the encouragement as to sale" was not in proportion "to the raptures expressed by the people who did read it." Indeed, the great dictator himself had the candor to confess that the *Rambler* was "too wordy." Johnson was not at his best in the *Rambler* papers, though he devoted much time and attention to their preparation. But while not happy as a whole, some of the papers, as, for instance, "Literary Courage" and the "Advantages of Living in a Garret," are quite readable. The latter is far the happier, the former being in the author's usual ponderous vein.

Johnson did not fail in the *Rambler* because he did not possess many of the essential qualities of an essayist. Humor, wit, judgment, and a rare knowledge of human nature—all these admirable qualities he had in no small degree. But the great moralist possessed, in addition, a pompous mannerism of which he was never quite able to divest himself. It was this that counteracted his other excellent qualities. It was this "sonorous grandiloquence" that Goldsmith had in mind when he said in jest that, if Johnson had occasion to make little fishes talk, he would make them talk like whales. Addison somewhere says: "No periodical writer, who always maintains his gravity and does not sometimes sacrifice to the Graces, must expect to keep in vogue any considerable time." It was just this bit of wisdom that Johnson never learned. He would never unbend, but was

always on his dignity. He could never sacrifice to the Graces, and this is the secret of the failure of the *Rambler*.

However, simple justice demands that we should add that the great moralist was happier in his next venture, the *Idler*. These papers were published from 1758 to 1760, and they show more ease and lightness of touch than Johnson's early essays. These *Idlers* contain the author's character sketch of Dick Minim, and, as Mr. Saintsbury observes, "Johnson as an essayist is most happy when he analyzes a character, in the manner of La Bruyère, mingling criticism with narrative." Nor is Johnson so verbose or so pedantic in his *Idler* papers. His sesquipedalians he uses here very sparingly, as he does also in his "Lives of the Poets." Prof. Minto maintains that in this latter work Johnson's style is not so Latinized as the average style of the present day, and that the proportion of Latin words here is not above half so great as in a leader of the London *Times*. Whether this be true or not, I am not prepared to say; but the style of the *Idlers* and of the "Lives of the Poets" seems far less Johnsonese.

Whatever the failings and shortcomings of Johnson as an essayist may have been, assuredly his efforts at the revival of the essay must be pronounced an eminent success. Swarms of imitators sprang into existence after him, and this period of the history of the essay almost rivaled that of the Queen Anne in popularity. But most of the essayists of the Georgian period were mere imitators of the Johnsonese style, and even Johnson by no means maintained the tradition of excellence set by the founders. Indeed, the essay seems to have reached its high-water mark for the century under Addison and Steele.

Among the host of imitators of the Johnsonese style (they imitated the dictator's mannerism, but lacked his vigor and force) was one writer who was destined to break with the prevailing fashion and write according to the dictates of his own refined taste. This was Oliver Goldsmith. In that age of magnificence of phrase and swelling bombast he stands out as a conspicuous exponent of an easy, graceful, and almost faultless prose style. Abandoning the periodic sen-

tence as unsuited to the essay, he adhered tenaciously to the loose sentence of Addison. It is true that in his formative period Goldsmith did conform to the dominant fashion of his day and "masqueraded in Johnsonian buckram." This was but natural, especially in view of the friendly and even intimate relation existing between the great literary autocrat and the improvident, good-natured Goldsmith, who as yet was a mere Grub Street hack writer. But Goldsmith soon abandoned his practice of imitation, a sin of his youth, and blazed out a path for himself. In learning to form his style he went back to Dryden, Temple, and Addison. Hence it came about that he developed in his essays that delicate, graceful style which commands universal admiration and is to-day held up as a model. A contemporary estimate of his genius is found in the epitaph (written by Johnson) upon his monument in Westminster Abbey: "*Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit*"—There was nothing he touched that he did not adorn.

Goldsmith continued the early tradition of the periodical essay as a criticism upon contemporary manners. For under the disguise of "Chinese Letters"—a series of essays which he contributed to Newbery's *Public Ledger*—he "assumed the person of a philosophic Chinaman, and criticised certain English customs and manners, such as the absurd form of dress, the practice of charging admission to the tombs of great men, the abuses in the administration of justice, and so forth." Goldsmith was well fitted by temperament and education to assume the point of view of a foreigner and to satirize, in his gentle way, the peculiar manners and customs of his nation, which, in his judgment, needed reforming. By nature a man of broad sympathies, he liked to regard himself as a citizen of the world. There was nothing insular about him—no national prejudice in his constitution. His judgment therefore was never warped by his narrowness of view, as was Johnson's. Goldsmith was so pleased with the cosmopolitan spirit of his essays that, when he subsequently collected them, he published them separately under the title of "The Citizen of the World."

The conception of the "Chinese Letters" was by no means original. It had been adopted before, with much success, by Montesquieu in his "Persian Letters," and with these Goldsmith must have been acquainted, if we may judge from a reference he makes to them in an article he published in the *Monthly Review*. Moreover, Horace Walpole had published a pamphlet consisting of "A Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher in London, to his friend Lien Chi, at Pekin;" and Mr. Austin Dobson has endeavored to show that this was the source whence the author of the "Chinese Letters" borrowed his idea. The "Chinese Letters" are marked by their accurate criticism, their delicate satire, and their gentle humor. The foreign air which the author tried to impart to the "Letters" does not count for much, only to give them a thin disguise. Lien Chi Altangi, writing to his friend Fum Hoam, in Pekin, does not make the comments on European civilization which you would expect an Oriental to make. Lien Chi's strictures are rather those of an Englishman who sees much in his nation to inveigh against and to be reformed. I venture to quote for illustration a brief passage from the essay on "National Prejudice." Its humor is admirable and the satire is quite delicate:

"The English seem as silent as the Japanese, yet vainer than the inhabitants of Siam. Upon my arrival I attributed that reserve to modesty, which I now find has its origin in pride. Condescend to address them first, and you are sure of their acquaintance; stoop to flattery, and you conciliate their friendship and esteem. They bear hunger, cold, fatigue, and all miseries of life without shrinking; danger only calls forth their fortitude; they even exult in calamity; but contempt is what they cannot bear. An Englishman fears contempt more than death; he often flies to death as a refuge from its pressure, and dies when he fancies the world has ceased to esteem him.

"Pride seems the source not only of their national vices but of their national virtues also. An Englishman is taught to love the king as his friend, but to acknowledge no other master than the laws which himself has contributed to enact.

He despises those nations who, that one may be free, are all content to be slaves; who first lift a tyrant into terror, and then shrink under his power as if delegated from Heaven. Liberty is echoed in all their assemblies, and thousands are ready to offer up their lives for the sound, though perhaps not one of all the number understands its meaning. The lowest mechanic, however, looks upon it as his duty to be a watchful guardian of his country's freedom, and often uses a language that might seem haughty even in the mouth of the great emperor who traces his ancestry to the moon.

"A few days ago, passing by one of their prisons, I could not avoid stopping, in order to listen to a dialogue which I thought might afford me some entertainment. The conversation was carried on between a debtor, through the grate of his prison, a porter who had stopped to rest his burden, and a soldier at the window. The subject was upon a threatened invasion from France, and each seemed extremely anxious to rescue his country from impending danger. 'For my part,' cries the prisoner, 'the greatest of my apprehension is for our freedom; if the French should conquer, what would become of English liberty? My dear friends, liberty is the Englishman's prerogative; we must preserve that at the expense of our lives; of that the French shall never deprive us. It is not to be expected that men who are slaves themselves would preserve our freedom, should they happen to conquer.' 'Ay, slaves!' cries the porter, 'they are all slaves, fit only to carry burdens, every one of them. Before I would stoop to slavery, let this be my poison' (and he held the goblet in his hand), 'may this be my poison; but I would sooner list for a soldier.' The soldier, taking the goblet from his hand with much awe, fervently cried out: 'It is not so much our liberty as our religion that would suffer by such a change; ay, our religion, my lads. May the devil sink me into flames' [such was the solemnity of his adjuration], 'if the French should come over, but our religion would be utterly undone.' So saying, instead of a libation, he applied the goblet to his lips, and confirmed his sentiments with a ceremony of the most persevering devotion."

As Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* created the character of Sir Roger de Coverley for our enjoyment, so Goldsmith, in his "Chinese Letters," brought into the world, as heirs of his invention, two extremely entertaining characters in his Man in Black and his Beau Tibbs. The Man in Black, with his helping hand and generous heart, is said to be a portrait of the happy-go-lucky, kind-hearted Oliver Goldsmith himself, who could never find it in his nature to turn a deaf ear to a call for need as long as he had a guinea in his pocket; and when his guineas failed and he was thrust into prison for debt, he could, even in these depressing surroundings, "turn a sentence on the humorous side of starvation." His own prodigal generosity seems reproduced in the Man in Black. When cast into prison he jestingly remarks that he is "now on one side of the door, and those who are unconfined are on the other; and that is all the difference between them." It was probably with such a stroke of wit that the real Goldsmith used to console himself when confined in no imaginary prison. His portrait of Beau Tibbs, that "prince of shabby-genteel gentlemen," who lodged in the first floor down the chimney, as he facetiously expressed it, is of its kind unsurpassed.

The essay on "A City Night Piece" is probably Goldsmith's tenderest and most pathetic production. Indeed, there are but few more touching pictures in English literature. As he contemplates the sad scenes of human misery in this picture, misery which he is unable to relieve, he cries out: "Why, why was I born a man, and yet see the sufferings of wretches I cannot relieve? Poor houseless creatures! the world will give you reproaches, but will not give you relief. The slightest misfortunes of the great, the most imaginary uneasiness of the rich, are aggravated with all the power of eloquence, and held up to engage our attention and sympathetic sorrow. The poor weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny, and every law which gives others security becomes an enemy to them. Why was this heart of mine formed with so much sensibility; or why was not my fortune adapted to its impulse? Tenderness,

without a capacity of relieving, only makes the man who feels it more wretched than the object which sues for assistance." When we read this passage we feel that the author is unbosoming his own heart, wrung by the anguish of others. We feel that his breast was full of the milk of human kindness. It is this feeling which endears him to the world and has won for him its gratitude. Here lies the secret, in his deep humanity, of the perennial charm of his essays.

After the death of Goldsmith the essay began again to decline, just as it had done before upon the death of Addison and Steele. Not that writers were lacking in the last quarter of the eighteenth century who endeavored to continue it. Essayists there were, but they did not possess the essential qualities, ease and grace, and were therefore unable to maintain the standard of excellence set by Goldsmith. Other forms of literature, consequently, supplanted the essay in public favor. Fiction now took the lead. The tendency toward character-sketching has already been noticed in the history of the essay. This tendency soon developed into a distinct branch of literature and became merged into the novel, which now began to absorb the public interest. The taste of the reading public was completely captivated by the novel. Even Goldsmith, in his day, saw this and so far yielded to the demand of the age as to write his charming story of the "Vicar of Wakefield."

Thus at the close of the eighteenth century the essay was eclipsed by the rising novel. However, during this century it had been the most enduring and characteristic form of literature, and had engaged the genius of the best writers. It was again revived, in the first quarter of the following century, by Hazlitt, and by Lamb in his inimitable "Essays of Elia." But it seems to have lost, in the nineteenth century, its distinctive feature of being a criticism of contemporary manners. It has now, at the end of the century and beginning of a new, become almost altogether associated with literary criticism. It is, however, not within the scope of the present study to extend the survey beyond the eighteenth century.

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